

Course Outline for A Cultural History of Satan (HUMA 3795; Winter 2011)

Contact info

Philip A. Harland (pharland AT yorku DOT ca), Vanier 248

Course description

This course investigates the origins, development and significance of personified evil–Satan and his demons–in early Judaism and in the history of Christianity. We will consider some of the most important literary and visual depictions of this figure (and his story) from the ancient world through the middle ages to our own day. In the process, we will shed light on how intellectuals thought of this figure, but also on how Satan came to play an important role in popular culture into the modern era (when this devilish character often makes an appearance in movies). Throughout we will be concerned with the social and other functions of Satan and his demons.

Required Books (available at the York University book store)

- Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
- Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Bible (modern translation such as NRSV, NEB, Jerusalem, NIV)
- Course pack (published by Canadian Scholars Press Inc., available at the bookstore)
- Posts on the history of Satan on my blog at: <http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/>

Evaluation (see end of syllabus for assignment descriptions)

- Assignment 1: Book review (Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*), 5 pages max., due Week 6 at the beginning of class – 20%
- Assignment 2: Analysis of primary sources, 8 pages, due Week 12 at the beginning of class – 25%
- Quiz in class Week 4 – 10%
- Test in class Week 11 – 30%
- Participation and attendance – 15%

Discussion schedule:

Unit 1: Ancient Origins of Personified Evil – Mesopotamia, Persia and Israel (from 3000 B.C.E.)

Week 1 (Jan 5)

Introduction to the academic study of Satan and personified evil Historical importance of Satan; Key terms and concepts

Readings:

- Russell, chapter 1; Beal, Introduction

Week 2 (Jan 12)

Satan's predecessors in the Ancient Near East: Mesopotamian chaos-monsters and Zoroastrian dualism (Ahriman)

Readings:

- "Anzu" (course pack); Psalm 74:12-17 and Psalm 89:5-18 (Bible); Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, section 370 (course pack); "Verses from Yasna 30" (course pack)
- Russell, chapter 2; Beal, chapter 1

Week 3 (Jan 19)

Satan's origins in Jewish apocalypticism: Fallen Angels and evil spirits

Readings:

- Genesis 6:1-8 (Bible); *1 Enoch* 1-16 (course pack); "The Rule of the Community" (Dead Sea Scrolls), columns 1-4 (course pack)
- Russell, chapter 3; Beal, chapters 3-4

Unit 2: Satan and Demons in early Christianity (origins-312 C.E.)

Week 4 (Jan 26)

Satan and his roles in early Christianity: Jesus, Paul, and John's Apocalypse

Readings:

- Gospel of Mark (esp. chapters 1-3); Gospel of Luke, chapter 4; 2 Corinthians, chapter 11; John's Apocalypse (Revelation), chapters 1-3, 12-19, especially chapters 12-13 (Bible); (Also look at the New Testament passages listed in Russell's Appendix 2, pp. 280-81)
- Russell, chapter 4; Beal, chapters 5-6

** Quiz in class**

Feb 2 No class due to snow day – additional final class added on Tuesday April 5 in our same classroom

Week 5 (Feb 9)

Developments in Satan's story in the first centuries: Satan (or the world-creator), Adam and Eve, and the serpent

Readings:

- “The Life of Adam and Eve” (course pack) , which re-tells and expands Genesis 2-3 (Bible)
- Russell, chapter 5

****Book Review due at the beginning of class****

Week 6 (Feb 16)

Developments continued: Gnostic uses of the serpent story in Genesis

Satan in the Church Fathers: Instigator of Idolatry (“Paganism”) and Heresy (150-430 CE and beyond), part 1

Readings:

- “On the Origin of the World”, sections 107-121 (course pack), which reinterprets Gen 1-7 (Bible)
- Russell, chapter 6

****Reading week Feb. 19-25 – no classes****

Week 7 (March 2)

Satan in the Church Fathers: Instigator of Idolatry (“Paganism”) and Heresy (150-430 CE and beyond)

Augustine and the “classical view”

Readings:

- Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chapter IV (course pack); Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, book 11, sections 13-19; book 21, sections 9-10 (course pack)
- Russell, chapter 7

Unit 3: Developments in Satan’s Story in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (312-1500)

Week 8 (March 9)

A brief history of Hell up to the Medieval period

Medieval perceptions of Satan: Visualizing hell’s torment and Satan (Dante’s *Inferno* and artistic depictions)

Readings:

- Dante, *Divine Comedy 1: Hell*, sections 1-5, 34 (course pack)
- Russell, chapter 8

Film in second half of class

Week 9 (Mar 16)

Medieval perceptions of Satan (continued): Popular religion, heresy, witchcraft, and internal battles of the Reformations

Readings:

- Shinnars, "Demons and Spirits" (course pack); Briggs, "Myths of the Perfect Witch" (course pack); Menno Simons, "The Church: An Instructive Comparison Whereby the Church of Christ and That of Antichrist May be Known" (course pack)
- Russell, chapters 9-10

Unit 4: Modern Re-configurations of Personified Evil (c. 1500-present)

Week 10 (Mar 23)

From traditional (evil) Satan to modern (Ironic) Mephisto: Milton (1600s) and Goethe (1700s)

Readings:

- Milton, *Paradise Lost* (sections in course pack); Goethe, *Faust* (sections in course pack)
- Russell, chapters 11-13

Week 11 (March 30)

****Test in class****

Week 12

Modern conceptions of evil: Satan as illusion (Freud) and evil personified in the twentieth century

Film

Readings: Russell, chapters 14-17

****Analysis of primary sources due in final class****

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Assignment 1: Review of Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (5 pages double-spaced)

Carefully read the assigned book, making note of the author=s main points or arguments. Write a review of the book (in the form of an essay), which entails:

- Summarizing the main argument (or point) of the book and how the author builds up this argument throughout the chapters (citing relevant page numbers in parentheses).
- Discussing the author=s methods (or approach) and the types of evidence he uses to support his points.
- Providing an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the book. Does the author achieve what she/he sets out to do? Is the argument convincing or not, and in what ways? Where do you

agree or disagree with the author=s assessment of the evidence and why? Be sure to provide concrete examples (citing page numbers in parentheses) of the problems or strengths you discuss.

- Addressing how the book relates to our discussions in class.

The review paper should have a *clear thesis statement* (concerning your overall evaluation of the book) which is supported throughout the paragraphs. The paper should be clearly written and structured with *no spelling or grammatical errors*. *Be succinct* and do not exceed the prescribed length. The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with early feedback concerning your analytical, writing and critical skills so that you can work on problematic areas (in writing labs at the university and on your own).

Assignment 2: Analysis of primary sources (8 pages double-spaced)

Carefully read and study the stories and legends in the fourth century Life of Saint Anthony (“Christianity in the Desert: St. Anthony the Great,” pp. 81- 88) and in the chapter on “Demons and Spirits” (both in the course pack), which date to the period c. 1000-1500. Read corresponding chapters in Russell (especially chapters 6 and 8).

Focus your attention on analyzing specific stories for yourself and write an essay on the following: *From the early monks to popular religion in the middle ages, demons or harmful spirits have played an important role in the world-view and actual lives of Christians*. In the process, address issues such as the following: What do these stories reveal about popular beliefs concerning demons, their nature and function? What activities did demons engage in and what were their motivations? How did demons relate to humans and to other beings (e.g. good spirits/angels, Satan)? What methods were available for people to counter the dangers of, or gain assistance from, demons? How were such methods viewed by those who wrote down these stories? What are the commonalities and differences among the perspectives of the various stories you analyze?

Note: Develop a clear thesis statement or argument that directly addresses the question. Be sure to deal substantially with the “Life of St. Anthony” and with *at least three* medieval stories in your analysis, identifying key passages and page numbers in parentheses to support your points. As usual, the paper will be marked in terms of both *form* (how well it is written, including proper grammar and spelling) and *content* (how well it addresses the question and analyzes the primary materials).
